

# Stabbing: A Bullied Boy Snapped, Resulting In Wounding

*A 14 year old male stabbed another boy in the back with scissors after enduring bullying.*

## **Background**

Christopher was a slightly built 13-year-old boy. In fact, his appearance was almost identical to the ‘Harry Potter’ film character, a fact commented upon by most people who knew him! Christopher had been the subject of several instances of bullying at his school, and this had begun to affect his health and life in general. Christopher’s parents had reported the bullying to the school, and although attempts were made to prevent re-occurrences, this did not prove very successful. The bullying took the form of verbal taunts inside and outside school, of a personal nature. These taunts were extremely hurtful to Christopher and he was struggling to cope with the stress that it was causing him.

## **The Offence**

One afternoon, during a science class, one of his ‘not so regular’ tormentors, Steven, began to tease Christopher in a way that Christopher felt would end in the usual taunts. In Christopher’s own words, at this point, ‘something snapped’. He picked up a pair of scissors from a nearby desk, and lunged at Steven’s back, cutting through clothes and piercing the skin near his shoulder blade. Terrified at his own reactions, he ran from the classroom and away from the school premises. Christopher had not planned any of these reactions, and was unsure of what to do next. Living in a rural town, Christopher walked through fields for a long time, until it got dark. He returned home late evening to frantic parents who had contacted the police and reported him missing from home. In the meantime, the police had been called to the school, and had taken statements from Steven and witnesses. The scenes of crimes service had been busy taking forensic samples, and Steven had been taken to the local hospital by his mother, Ruth, who was a Teacher on duty at the same school. Steven’s injuries turned out to be minor, but would have been very serious if the scissors had punctured a lung.

## **Charges**

The police deliberated as to whether to charge Christopher (who was of previous good character) with wounding – a very serious offence. After taking all of the facts and history into account, plus a statement from the victim requesting leniency, a decision was taken to give Christopher

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Warning. Christopher was excluded from the school for an indefinite period, to be reviewed on a regular basis by the Head Teacher. Following the Final Warning assessment, Christopher was referred for short-term intervention work to address his offending behaviour. A referral was also made to the Youth Offending Service Restorative Justice Worker. The reason for the referral was to consider a Restorative Conference. This was at the request of a very remorseful Christopher, and supported by his parents.

### **Restorative Conference**

During the Restorative Conference assessment, Christopher expressed deep remorse for his actions, and was anxious to explain to Steven that the incident was not planned and that he had reacted irrationally for reasons not connected with Steven. Christopher did not want to discuss the bullying with Steven, as he did not wish to be seen as a 'wimp' or to minimise the seriousness of his crime. Christopher's mother, Debra, was quite tearful during the assessment, but totally supported her son's commitment to a restorative justice conference. After the trauma of these events, she was glad to have a reason to feel proud of Christopher once again. I then contacted Steven's mother, Ruth, and arranged to visit. During my visit, Steven was very quiet, although he listened intently to the explanation of the restorative process, and Christopher's version of events. He readily agreed to take part in a restorative conference. Ruth, however, was less convinced of the merits of such a meeting, and doubted the sincerity of Christopher's remorse, but agreed to support Steven, as he clearly wanted to take part. After spending two 2 hour sessions with both parties, the meeting took place in the Inspector's office at the local police station. This office was pleasant and airy, and the venue was the preferred option of Steven, and Christopher was comfortable with this. During the meeting, Christopher described the events with amazing eloquence, pleasantly surprised his tearful mother, and clearly moved Steven and Ruth. Although Christopher did not make reference to the persistent bullying that he had suffered at the hands of some other students, it was clear that he had been driven to his drastic action by a great deal of pressure, and his remorse showed that this was obviously very out of character for him. Steven, to the amazement of all present, especially Ruth, responded by saying "I'm sorry if anything I said made you do that." This was a very brave statement by Steven, which clearly indicated that he had been aware of some of the pressure that Christopher had been under, due to the stress caused by bullies. The chemistry between the boys changed at that moment from distant tension to mutual empathy.

Debra gave an emotional, but very poignant account of the impact that this had had on her and the rest of the family, and reinforced her son's remorse. Ruth had been visibly stunned by Steven's response to Christopher, and was only able to say a few words about how it had affected her and her family. The meeting was closed, and Christopher and his mother looked relieved and happy. I asked Ruth and Steven to remain after the others had left. Ruth could barely contain her anger towards her son. She said that she had felt humiliated that Steven had lied to her about the fact that he had not taken any part in bullying Christopher. This, she felt, had reflected on her abilities as a mother and a teacher. Steven left us for a short time of his own accord. I assured Ruth that far from reflecting negatively, this process had shown that she had a son who was prepared to do the right thing at a time when it was so important to Christopher, knowing that it would make his mother feel the way she did at that moment. What Steven had done showed great courage, and therefore deserved praise for his honesty. Ruth eventually saw this point of view, and, when Steven returned, she ruffled his hair and gave him a hug. The contents of this meeting, with permission of all concerned parties, was related to the Head Teacher. As a direct result of this, Christopher was allowed back to school very soon after, and settled back well into school life. He has not re-offended, and I believe is unlikely to.